The Church
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International Peace

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VI

The Church's Mission as to War and Peace

by

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The Church's Mission as to War and Peace

JUNIUS B. REMENSNYDER, D.D., LL.D.

Church and State, with the Family, are held by sociological writers to be the pillars of society. Upon these rest all our social institutions. Each has indeed a distinct sphere. But their co-relations and interdependences are of the closest character. They mutually support one another. And when either one fails in its duty, violates its obligation to the other, then society is injured, deteriorates, and civilization comes to a standstill, or relapses toward barbarism.

It results therefore that Church and State, if not formally connected, as in Europe, still have *a vital organic relation.* The sphere of the Church is spiritual. Yet, in the discharge of this spiritual fashioning of the motives, aims and work of the souls entrusted to her care, it is the distinct duty of the Church to make good citizens, to inculcate a loyal support of the State. The Church has a responsibility to see to it that there be a *Christian* State. While she must avoid politics as such, yet her voice should be heard upon the moral aspect of public questions. And her testimony should ring out sharp and clear against policies which injure the public welfare, and trample upon the essential principles and maxims of morality and religion.

It is on these grounds that the Church has a special mission with respect to *war.* War is a resort to physical force to adjust the differences between nations. This method, as between individuals, the Church by its infusion of Christian ethics, has banished, as belonging to the sphere of barbarism. And none the less does the Church place war (as between nations) in the same category.

Now, at the present juncture, we find ourselves confronted by two ideals, in direct opposition. One is that of what we

may call the *the world-empire spirit.* The several races of men, separated partially by blood, by language, historical traditions and national boundaries, look upon each other as rivals, and seek the leadership, to one another's hurt, with a great ambition to wield the sceptre over the world. This aspiration and effort are held to develop the virile virtues of the race, and to call forth those energies which form the noblest type of manhood.

This ideal is set forth in the famous book of Treitschke, for many years the most popular of professors in Germany, instilling his theories into the youth of that country. And no less distinctly has it been urged in England by the distinguished Professor Cramb. To get a vivid conception of it I quote from the brilliant book of the latter:

"I have described the attitude of the youth of Germany, soldiers, students, professors, politicians, writers of books. Their position is clear. 'Are we to acquiesce,' they ask, 'in England's possession of one-fifth of the globe, with no title deeds, no claim except priority in robbery? Our greatest teachers so describe it.' With what thoughts are they to read the history and the literature of their country? If, from love of peace or dread of war, Germany submits, it would seem as if her great soldiers had fought in vain, as if the long roll of her battles had passed like an empty sound, as if the Great Elector and Frederick, Stein and Scharnhorst and Bismarck had schemed in vain, as if her thinkers had thought their thoughts and her poets had dreamed their dreams not less in vain. But if, on the other hand, Germany has not declined from her ancient valor the issue is certain, and a speedy issue.

"It is war.

"And if the dire event of a war with Germany—if it *is* a dire event—should ever occur, there shall be seen upon this earth of ours a conflict which, beyond all others, will recall that description of the great Greek wars:

> " 'Heroes in battle with heroes,
> And above them the wrathful gods.'

And one can imagine the ancient, mighty deity of all the Teutonic kindred, throned above the clouds, looking serenely down upon that conflict, upon his favorite children, the English and the Germans, locked in a death struggle, smiling upon the heroism of that struggle, the heroism of the childern of Odin the War God!"

When such thoughts, so in harmony with that spirit of ambition, rivalry, and yearning for glory, inspiring the natural man—a reminiscence of the brute instinct—are inculcated in

such stirring phrases, shall we wonder that the slightest spark leads to a world-wide conflagration!

Opposed to this ideal, so largely ruling the State in all history, and unexpectedly coming to the front at present, as dominant in Europe, is the *Christian ideal*—that of the Church. The Church takes for its standard of moral authority the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Here it finds the holy and perfect will of God, as expressed in precepts, statutes and ordinances. And here it finds that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the earth," that He is their "Father," and that as His children, they are to be brothers; that the dominant law of their mutual conduct is to be that of love; that selfishness is the bane of social life, and that it is to be resisted and overcome. And the great Teacher and Master, when He saw His disciples in a contention as to which should be the greatest in His kingdom, set them an example of humility by washing their feet, and then gave them this precept: "Let him that is chief among you, be as he that doth serve." So, in the Old Testament it is said of the Almighty One, as He looks down upon strife and confusion in the world: "He maketh *wars to cease* unto the end of the earth"; and, when the new Christian era is inaugurated, it is with the angelic song, "On earth, PEACE, good will to men."

Now it is clear as the light of the sun that there can be no agreement between these two ideals. They are as far apart, and as direct opposites, as the poles. One means Selfishness, the other Charity. One means Love, the other Hate. One means Peace, the other War. War is antagonistic to Christianity for many reasons, but chiefly on account of the ugly passions it excites, and the untold misery it inflicts, and that upon those almost wholly if not altogether innocent of bringing it about.

Imagination can easily enough conceive of the terrors of the field of battle. But having enlisted at his country's call, while a young student at college—to which he afterward returned—the writer would, to show how immeasurably

reality transcends imagination, give here a description of his personal experience and observation in one of the bloodiest fields of our civil war, viz. : Fredericksburg. It depicts a phase not often described, i. e., the field during the lull in a yet undecided battle.

Crossing the Rappahannock River, which lay between the town and the fortified Confederate lines, on a narrow, frail pontoon, it was a harrowing sight to see one's comrades torn from his side by the bursting shells from the enemy's heavy guns. Having ascended the river bank, we were on a level plain immediately in front of the rifle pits and earth-works, from which poured so deadly a hail of bullets that we could only escape death by falling flat on our faces, and as we lay there for hours, the air screamed with the hiss of millions of bullets so close to our heads, that to raise them a few inches meant certain death. At last the sun, which seemed to hang for an eternity a lurid red ball on the edge of the horizon, sank, and under cover of darkness we retired from the field. Utterly exhausted with marching, with intense excitement and hunger, we lay down to sleep.

And then it was that our senses awakened to such a sound as we never before had dreamed of, and as altogether beggared description. This came from the cries and shrieks of the wounded and dying on the field we had just left. It seemed to arise from a hundred thousand throats from one end of the field to the other. And infinitely awful it was! It was a concourse of all manner of horrible cries. Screams of agony that rent the very skies; appeals to God for pity and help; occasional shrieks, as if from pent-up, unbearable pain, rising louder than all the rest; and deep, bawling moans from those evidently made insane by suffering. Yet, discordant as were these wails and shrieks, their number and incessant continuity made them seem to blend into one great symphony of agonized sound—one mighty Niagara of woe and despair!

It was absolutely appalling. One might conjure up all the cruelities he had ever heard practiced by barbarous races,

or all that he had ever heard of the horrors of a physical hell, but this pandemonium of tortured cries surpassed them as reality exceeds imagination, as fact pales fiction.

And such are the pitiless rules of the undecided battle, that all these calls for help must be utterly disregarded. During the long winter night this wretched multitude must lie on the field with no tender hand to ease the aching head, no medical skill to staunch the life-blood's flow, no anaesthetic to relieve the intolerable pain, not even a drop of water to moisten the parched tongue or glazed throat.

As the writer lay there that weary, awful night, sleep banished from his eyes, with the consciousness that on the morrow the same fate might be his, these sounds and that scene were burned into the core of his memory like a hideous nightmare whose spectre will not down life-long.

And then and there he learned *a lesson as to war.* He was a Christian, and those deliberately inflicting upon one another these awful mutilations were men of a civilized land, fellow Americans, confessors of a religion whose basal tenet was brotherhood, disciples of a Master Whose maxim to His followers was: "Forgive your enemies," "Love one another," "Peace I leave with you."

And he received a lasting conviction that war between Christian peoples was utterly indefensible. And that, could statesmen and clergymen witness such a holocaust of horror, they would hesitate before making flaming call to arms, and would find terms of amicable and honorable adjustment.

But there are other horrors of war beside the actual sufferings of the field. These were vividly depicted by the trenchant pen of good old Dr. Samuel Johnson thus: "War has means of destruction more formidable than the cannon and sword. Of the thousands, tens and hundreds of thousands that perish, very small part ever feel the stroke of the enemy, the rest languish in tents and ships, amidst damps and putrefaction; pale, torpid, spiritless and helpless—gasping and groaning, unpitied among men, made obdurate by long continuance of hopeless misery; and are at last whelmed in pits,

or heaved into the ocean, without notice and without remembrance. By incommodious encampments and unwholesome stations, where courage is useless and enterprise impracticable, fleets are silently dispeopled, and armies sluggishly melted away."

And then there is the *Aftermath* of War, widows and orphans mourning for the non-returning husband and father, homes once bright and happy, now saddened and desolate, and burdened with crushing and grinding poverty. Then, the demoralization of young men, and the brutalizing influences in a bloody strife, which almost makes necessary all sorts of heartlessness and cruelty. What a derangement, too, and setback of religious work, missionary enterprise, and all forms of spiritual activity! Then Schiller's line sums up the result as to the deterioration of the quality of the male sex: "Always war devours the best." The very flower of the youth and those of middle-age go into the war at the beginning, and of these a large part die before the end. "This," as says Chancellor Jordan of Stanford University, in his late book on the Effects of War, "produces a change in the balance of society by reducing the percentage of the better types without a corresponding reduction of the less desirable types; a condition which is projected into the next generation because the inferiors live to have progeny and the others do not." After each war comes the paucity of genius, the failure of personal initiative, a great decadence in literature. War also costs millions for each day that it is carried on. This the present peoples are quite unable to pay. And so the burden is placed upon coming generations, who are so bowed down under oppressive taxes that they are practically slaves for centuries. The war debts of Europe now amount to the inconceivable amount of $30,000,000,000, and as long as war continues, go on increasing at the rate of $300,000,000 a month.

When war is thus considered in its manifold aspects of evil, misery, bitter passions and tragedies, can there be doubt as to where *the Church,* bearing the Gospel, and preaching

the spirit and imitation of her Lord, *should stand with regard to it?* The only question, then, is not as to her uncompromising attitude, but as to *how* she shall most effectually oppose, limit the destructive sphere, and cause the final overthrow of, this monster of barbarism.

First, by always and everywhere *bearing witness against it.* The Church is not true to her divine mission and message when she justifies the war conducted by her own country, while only condemning that of others. In the great European war we have the spectacle of each church declaring that her own nation is perfectly right in resorting to the barbaric method of war. The respective churches of England and Germany, for example, are supporting and issuing prayers for the bloody work of their armies, as if they could expect the blessing of the "very God of Peace" to rest upon them. The position of the Church should be, "Your cause may be absolutely just, but Christianity demands that you submit it to the arbitrament of the International Court of the Hague, and not seek to settle it by the brutal and unjust tribunal of force." If the churches of all the great warring nations united and stood firmly upon this basis, we feel sure that, seconded by the peoples themselves, who are bearing the awful results in personal and financial losses, the various rulers would shortly be compelled to establish peace.

The Church, further, will contribute most effectively to peace when she *exposes the real cause of war,* when she diagnoses truly the root of the disease. One of the most encouraging signs of the present, as indicating an advance in the influence of Christianity, is the appeal of the warring nations to Christendom for a favorable verdict. Each feels that it is a terrible crime in the esteem of civilization for the one who bears the responsibility of inciting the war. But the Church would make a fatal mistake if she adjudged one of the parties the prime aggressor, and ascribed all the blame to that individual nation alone. We rather agree with the explanation given by a distinguished statesman: "There is no ethical justification of this war from any standpoint. There

is only an explanation of the war from an economic standpoint. Let us thrust aside in these dark moments of peril and horror all subterfuge." That is, the true explanation of this war is to be traced to misgovernment, internal dissatisfaction, national rivalry, commercial jealousy, and the tempting vision of world-empire. That this general, selfish, worldly, non-Christian spirit, *common, more or less, to all the powers,* and not the specific aggressive act of one, is *the real cause of this horrid strife,* is shown by the fact that all these powers have been looking for it, have held it to be inevitable, have felt that the fire was rankling underneath the crust of European civilization, and that it was an altogether secondary matter, as to what would be the incidental occasion.

It is then this world-spirit, this carnal human heart, this generic selfishness and unbrotherly race antagonism, which is the cause of prejudice, bitterness and strife, culminating in war, at which the Church must direct her opposition. Only by exorcising it, and banishing it from the world's theatre, can there be peace.

And this can be done alone by the Church *preaching the Gospel.* Nothing more than the present unprecedented strife, with horrors more appalling than ever witnessed before, shows the mistake of diplomats, social philosophers, mere ethicists and rationalistic ministers, who think that this age has progressed beyond the teachings of Christianity. The historic Church has ever held with Paul that the human heart is "deceitful and desperately wicked," and that it needs to be radically changed into another personality before it can be truly Christian. The special mission of the Church is to effect this spiritual regeneration. Men speak of the present war as an evidence of the failure of Christianity. Quite the contrary, it only demonstrates that men are *not Christianized enough.* What they want is more of Christianity. Only when they put the Gospel to practice in their hearts and lives by becoming "new creatures in Christ Jesus," will they "learn war no more."

As writes a recent Biblical critic: "I was at first staggered by the recent events in Europe, but I quickly recovered myself as I thought that this barbaric display has been the result of a partially accepted Christianity. Then I turned to these volumes by Dr. MacLaren, and was reminded most impressively that, if we are to get rid forever of bloody militarism in Europe and merciless commercialism in America, it can only be by a careful, thought-out presentation of the Christian message which appeals at once to the conscience, the intellect, the emotions, and the will."

Finally, the Church, by not allowing her sacred mission to be embroiled with political and partisan views, can exercise a potent and most beneficent influence *for a righteous adjustment when there comes the framing of peace.* In this crisis, when each party is seeking the advantage, and when the conquering power is disposed to act in the spirit of selfish injustice, the danger is greatest. And as only that peace can be lasting which is equitable to all, then it is that the churches can be the agents of greatest usefulness.

Mr. Roosevelt is engaged in writing a series of articles in which he reproaches the advocates of peace in these words: "The weaklings who raise their shrill piping for a peace that shall consecrate successful wrong occupy a position quite as immoral as, and infinitely more contemptible than the position of the wrongdoers themselves." We believe that truer and broader-minded is the attitude of Mr. Carnegie, when in his late *Independent* article he said that the foundation for a world-peace court had been laid when, on September 5th, Great Britain, France and Russia had mutually agreed not to make peace separately and added:

"After the present belligerents agree upon peaceful settlement, Germany and Austria should be the first invited by the Allies to join in forming a league of peace."

It is just the present agitators for peace, and the churches who are preaching the Christian spirit of forbearance and brotherly love, who, when the terms of final adjustment are being discussed, will stand to the last for, and will be

the most potent factors of, a peace which will not be arbitrary, but just, not the voice of force, but that of righteousness, and therefore a durable one.

Such should be the attitude of the Christian Church toward the barbaric demon of war, and such the agencies which she employes to circumvent his overthrow. It is evident that all other agencies, political, ethical, social, cultural and commercial, have failed and ever will fail. War, in the past, has always driven men to the Church, and more than ever can the Church now, by fidelity to the Gospel, by energetically pressing her holy mission, win the confidence of mankind, and gather all nations under the banner of a world-wide brotherhood of peace, when we may say with Whittier:

"Lend, once again, that holy song a tongue
Which the glad angels of the Advent sung,
Their cradle-anthem for the Saviour's birth,
'Glory to God, and Peace unto the Earth.'
Through the mad discord send that calming word
Which wind and wave on wild Gennesareth heard.
Lift in Christ's name His CROSS against the SWORD."

The Church Peace Union

(*Founded by Andrew Carnegie*)

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